

RAY JOHNSON

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Ray Johnson



HOWARD JOHNSON





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RAY JOHNSON
144 WEST 7 STREET
LOCUST VALLEY
NEW YORK 11560

Shelley Wanger says

hello

Brad gooch,
congratulations

on your Frank
O'Hara book

WHICH I
READ

Dorothy Podber at a
poetry reading once
handcuffed Frank
O'Hara to Merce
Cunningham. Dorothy
also put the
bullet through the
Warhol Marilyn.

I am reading KISSES SCARRED

Letter from Ray Johnson to the author, 1993

Please Send to Ray Johnson

BRAD GOOCH

Over a few months in 1993 I received three letters marked with a smudged rubber-stamped return address from someone named Ray Johnson at 44 WEST 7 STREET LOCUST VALLEY NEW YORK 11560. I was pretty sure I didn't know anybody in Locust Valley, but I had recently published a biography of the poet Frank O'Hara, and the sender seemed fixated on O'Hara. Over an indigo-colored photocopied ad for something called a "Nothing by Ray Johnson July 30," he had written in black Magic Marker, "Please send to Frank O'Hara." A note to me, half in ink, half in pencil, began, "Brad gooch, congratulations on your Frank O'Hara book," with a precise clarification added in the margin: "=WHICH I READ."¹

The penciled bottom portion of the note shared a bit of deep gossip of the sort O'Hara adored. "Dorothy Podber at a poetry reading once handcuffed Frank O'Hara to Merce Cunningham," he informed me. "Dorothy also put the bullet through the Warhol Marilyns." (I did know of that dark and gleeful incident — the performance artist had shot a pistol into a stack of Marilyn paintings at the Factory, eventually enhancing their value as the "Shot Marilyns.") Scribbled at the top was a single clue: "Shelley Wanger says hello." As Shelley was my editor, I called her to ask about these weird, unsolicited letters I had been gifted with, crammed with red-pencil silhouettes of Willem de Kooning floating like thought balloons awaiting a thought, Xeroxes of postcards scribbled with wriggly adders, and a photograph reproduced in triplicate of Johnson driving a convertible. "Just hold on to them," advised Shelley in her cool, knowing voice, with no other information given.

The advice was good. Two of the many creased pages of visual puns and inside jokes I nearly tossed out more than twenty years ago now hang in

solid white frames in my apartment: one a crayon-red *Wheel of Fortune* drawing with names of art-world types at each click stop (Bruce Nauman, On Kawara); the other, slinking auricular silhouettes joking on the phrase “EAR DIARY” written in block letters across the page. I feel embarrassed that I was not bold or perceptive enough to follow through on the prompt he provided: “Please add to & return to Ray Johnson.” Yet I was not alone. “There is something intrusive and disquieting about a largely unintelligible letter from a stranger who clearly has been thinking of you,” the culture critic Wendy Steiner has written of her unanswered missives from Johnson.² In never quite getting them out of my mind, while coming later to recognize their haunting endurance and wishing to see them daily and to be ennobled by their playful prankishness, I was likewise merely one of many.

The somber plot point that brought Johnson back into my consciousness soon afterward was his untimely, no, *timely* death, since the timing was controlled by him, just a year or so after my cryptic invitations to his self-described School of Correspondence — sometimes spelled by him with an *a*, putting the “dance” back into correspondence. It turned out he had been saturating the art world with his letters for decades, and so word spread fast. On January 13, 1995, at the age of sixty-seven, Ray Johnson jumped off the Sag Harbor-North Haven Bridge and was last seen, by a couple of teenage girls, backstroking toward a cove in thirty-nine-degree waters. His suicide was clearly a performance: he checked into room #13 of a nearby motel under the name “New York Correspondence School”; his Locust Valley home was left meticulously arranged as an archive, with all his work neatly boxed and shelved, part treasure hunt, part pyramid.

Johnson’s riddle of a death quickly became his most famous artwork, the soupçon of mystery that helped explain the success a few years later of *How to Draw a Bunny* — a documentary film about the artist. Yet Johnson’s end was very much his beginning. T. S. Eliot has written that the difference between an okay author and a great one is the legibility of a lifetime design in the works of the greater author, not just single hits. Johnson was just such an obsessive patternmaker in his life and work, and was forever scrambling the two. All the elements were present from the start: the witty eye, the



Ray Johnson's home in Locust Valley, New York, as he left it in January 1995



Richard Lippold, Morton Feldman, John Cage, and Ray Johnson in a photograph published
in *Harper's Bazaar*, 1952

textural jump cutting, the nonchalant flirting with oblivion. Even his carefully managed low profile — allowing this inveterate insider to go on creating outlier art — was recognizable early on. In her *New York Times* review of Johnson's first gallery show, at Willard Gallery in 1965, Grace Glueck was already describing him as "New York's most famous unknown artist."³

Johnson's art pedigree and erudition were irrefutable. Born in Detroit, he took classes as a teenager at the Art Institute of Chicago and then attended Black Mountain College, between 1945 and 1948, where he studied color and design with Josef Albers, painting with Robert Motherwell, and befriended Merce Cunningham, instructors John Cage and Willem de Kooning, and sculptor Richard Lippold, who became a lover for decades, even though Lippold was married with two daughters. A 1952 photo in *Harper's Bazaar* captured the first phase of Johnson's life in New York City: he is riding in Lippold's vintage hearse, along with Cage and composer Morton Feldman, all four living in a tenement on the Lower East Side and described in the caption as "experimental, even stratospheric artists."⁴ Johnson nourished an avid interest in Eastern philosophies of impermanence not only in talks with Cage but also by working as a clerk at Orientalia, a bookstore on East 12th Street. As part of a gig for New Directions, he designed the iconic Benday-dots photograph of Arthur Rimbaud for the paperback edition of *Illuminations*.

His early art revealed him working his way out from beneath the influence of his impossibly charismatic teachers. He made quilt-like paintings with a palette knife on wood that reflected the Bauhaus-type abstraction of Albers and the self-abnegation he learned from Ad Reinhardt; much of this juvenilia was purportedly burned by him circa 1955 in Cy Twombly's fireplace. He then turned mostly to his lifelong opus fashioned from miscellany and deliberately "minor" material and mediums. In the mid-1950s he began to mail mimeographed lists as well as offset printings of multiple pages of individual texts and drawings. For one such correspondence, he Scotch-taped a dictionary definition of "celery" to a magazine reproduction of his friend Andy Warhol's painting of a Campbell's cream of celery soup can, paired with the label from a can of Andy Boy-brand celery hearts. He

also created “Nothing” events as a joke on Allan Kaprow’s “Happenings.” (A single pun was reason enough for Johnson to follow through on an elaborate project.) At one “Nothing” at Maidstone Gallery in 1962, the audience gathered, and nothing happened until Johnson heaved a box of wooden spindles down the gallery staircase.

His enigmatic persona kept everyone perplexed and often drew comparisons to Zen monks, hermits, and other insular types. Having moved to Dover Street, near Chinatown, his head a bald egg with high cheekbones and piercing blue eyes, shy, speaking in a voice Robert Pincus-Witten later described as “fluty [...] with a high-pitched breathlessness he never lost,”⁵ Johnson claimed to live a life of “voluntary poverty”⁶ with a table, bed, chair, typewriter, coffee pot, and no art on the walls. He sealed his deal with this peculiar brand of sociable solitariness by moving in 1968 to “an old white farmhouse with a Joseph Cornell attic” in the “nothingsville” of Glen Cove, Long Island.⁷ The reclusive Cornell was likely his model for this life of seclusion, as Johnson had been visiting the artist, as a kind of pilgrimage, at his modest home in Utopia Parkway, Queens, and exulting in their meals of canned spaghetti, peas, and carrots, which they ate while listening to Dionne Warwick. In 1970 Johnson moved to Locust Valley, where he lived for the rest of his life.

According to his bemused dealers Richard Feigen and Frances Beatty, who kept encouraging him toward an ever-elusive one-person gallery show in the last two decades of his life, Johnson was similar to Cornell in more than his address in an outlying county. Feigen maintained he was “a lot like Cornell” because he “didn’t want to sell anything.”⁸ A prominent element in Johnson’s collage *Bee Stings* (1973–94) [page 145] is a handwritten note on a small sheet of lined white paper reproduced in three different sizes and magnifications: “Dear Whitney Museum, i hate you. Love, Ray.” This ambivalent swing between love and hate for all things involving fame and money was the systole and diastole of his career. He preferred to exhibit his early work stuck in the uneven floorboards of a downtown warehouse, or on outdoor steps, or arranged on a dilapidated cellar door, as he did with his collage panels — or “moticos,” as he called them — in 1955. “In the end they are



Ray Johnson outside his home in Locust Valley, c. 1969



Ray Johnson's moticos installed in the floorboards of Ad Reinhardt's studio, New York, 1955

more involved with intimacy than with public occasion,” wrote his friend, the art critic Suzi Gablik.⁹ He was even known to sell collages to foreign collectors from a lurid motel room rented by the half hour, a furtive setup usually reserved for hasty sexual transactions.

All these stunts were deliberately outrageous, yet they were also deceptive and could camouflage the serious long game Johnson was playing. That long game is nowhere more on display than in the collages he continued to work on assiduously over the next two decades in his austere workshop, far from the madding crowd while somehow exhaustively still in the mix. These were his masterworks, as much as they might primp and shy away from such a grand framing. Johnson crammed an entire architectural dig of visual references and found objects into their ken: snippets of photographs; clippings from movie fanzines, porn rags, and newspapers; sheet music; comic strips; computer punch cards; dried starfish; a Corona Trinidad cigar box; neatly copied and recopied lists of names of artists, dealers, collectors, and curators, the product of an arduous and repetitive task that read like nothing so much as an art-world phone book without the numbers. All were constructed with cheap, easily available materials — shirt cardboards from the laundry, Elmer’s glue — then cut and pasted, doodled and painted, sanded and scraped with an obsessive finesse to arrive at the end result of their nearly painterly finish.

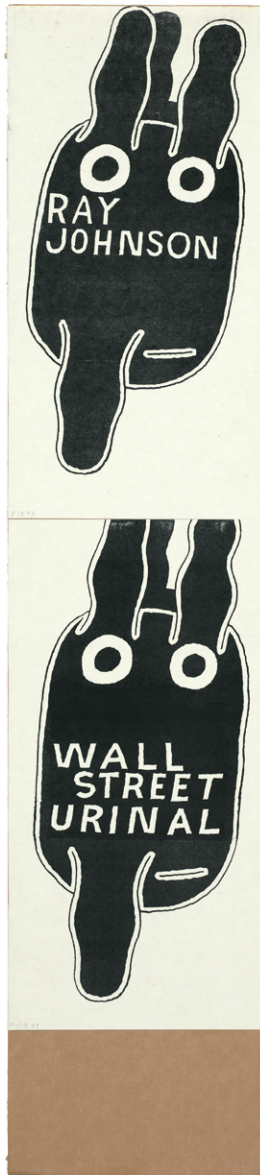
The somber palette of these works is surprising when seen in a wide selection. Pop art is often raised in discussions of Johnson’s work, usually to make the point that he experimented with Benday dots before Lichtenstein, or with Elvis and other celebrities before Warhol. Yet instead of cartoon or Technicolor vividness, Johnson confined his early work to the mostly secondary shades used in the four-color printing process — cyan, magenta, and yellow, plus black — and his collages often fade to tan, gray, gold, or rose. Likewise, his celebrities emote in a less brash mode. In *Untitled (Elvis with Scarface Bunny)* (1993), Elvis sheds a violet tear [page 185]. Attesting to serious intent, as well, was Johnson’s compound dating technique, as he tenth-guessed himself, revising fastidiously while tunneling through the years: his notation on *Untitled (Gertrude Stein Urinating/Dear Marilyn*

Monroe) — “1976–1988–89–91” — resembles a social security number as much as any helpful archival date [page 149].

Like jokes sublimely told by a tortured stand-up comedian, or songs belted out by a diva on painkillers, the invariable takeaways from Johnson’s painstakingly executed works remain surprise and joy, excitement and entertainment. He developed his own idiosyncratic, hieroglyphic language, which we decipher incrementally, with practice: rows of identical buttons, fingers gloved in stars, jagged teeth menacing streams of penises with Betty Boop eyes, swans and ducks, and the omnipresent “Kilroy Was Here” bunny with its squishy nose. Send-ups of portraiture were the silhouettes he made of famous friends, sometimes superimposed, as in *Craig Claiborne Lou Reed* (1977) [page 73]. And who but Ray Johnson, taking a postmodern high-low aesthetic to centripetal extremes, would/could combine on a single illustration board a reproduction of Mondrian’s *New York City* (1942), a cross-hatched drawing of a two-headed snake, and “Frank Sinatra’s underwear,” as he does in *Untitled (Mondrian/Sinatra’s Underwear)* (1975–81) [page 89]?

“Kinky” is a word that comes to mind to describe such humorous and perverse works as *Untitled (Ray Johnson and Wall Street Urinal Bunnies)* (1994) [opposite]. “Campy” has been used, too, a bit more historically appropriate, perhaps, in the sense of Susan Sontag’s famous definition in her 1964 essay “Notes on ‘Camp’”: “Camp asserts that good taste is not simply good taste, that there exists, indeed, a good taste of bad taste.”¹⁰ And Sontag located “camp” especially within the purview of “the homosexual.” Usually seen out and about in a black leather biker jacket, the edgiest uniform in gay clubs of the 1970s, Johnson did sprinkle his works with coded visual jokes to be enjoyed by this crowd. James Dean could be seen performing fellatio on a Coke bottle while Jasper Johns checks him out from the side in *Untitled (Jasper Johns, James Dean with Coca-Cola)* (1993) [page 177]. The beach bum with the curvaceous bum in *Untitled (Coplans/Shirley Temple)* (1972–91) [page 129] looks to have wandered off the set of Wakefield Poole’s *Boys in the Sand*, to the shock and awe of “America’s sweetheart.”

Johnson’s fascination with Frank O’Hara (of which I was an unwitting beneficiary) is not only understandable but perhaps one of the most telling



Untitled (Ray Johnson and Wall Street Urinal Bunnies), 1994.
Collage on board. 32 x 7 inches; 81 x 18 cm



A Shoe (John Cage Shoes), 1977. Gelatin silver print. 10 x 8 inches; 25 x 20 cm

clues he left for interpreting the giant rebus that was his life's work. Not only because of O'Hara's bold mixing of gay argot into the elegance of his verse, as in the poem "You are gorgeous and I'm coming,"¹¹ or his casual dips into tabloid culture — in 1955 O'Hara began writing a series of elegies for James Dean at about the same moment Johnson was producing *Untitled (James Dean in the Rain)* (c. 1955–58). Their most significant affinities were their studied indifference to professionalism in art and poetry, and their willful blindness to the traditional dividing lines between art and life — or, in Johnson's case, art and death. O'Hara wrote impromptu poems to friends on cocktail napkins in bars, or with a sample Olivetti showroom typewriter on his lunch hour, and was rarely published during his lifetime. He spelled out his aesthetic in a single manifesto, "Personism" (1959), in which he chatily praises poetry that exists "at last between two persons instead of two pages."¹² Johnson's works exist in the same insouciant interzone.

Yet this bent attitude has not made matters simple for archivists and curators of Johnson's extraordinary legacy of things. Though he made fun of "Oh dat concept art,"¹³ much of his output consists of ephemeral mind games or dense puzzles of perception and language, with some recent commentators picking up on his mail art as prophetic of chat rooms, Twitter, and Facebook. When he embraced materials, he could be just as far-out. What is one to make of (and how should one display) the snazzy and vaguely fetishistic two-tone shoes labeled "John" and "Cage" in *A Shoe (John Cage Shoes)* (1977) [opposite]? His plaster-cast faux death mask of Candy Darling, *Candy Darling Cast* (1970) [page 23] — mummifying her forever with her false eyelashes — is designed for a plastic tote bag rather than a frame. As he later recalled, "I had once walked around with the head of Candy Darling in a plastic bag."¹⁴ Like Joseph Cornell's boxes, these magical, totemic objects straddle the second and third dimensions.

Johnson's creations hover at last between two persons rather than being fixed permanently on a gallery wall. He remained fascinated throughout his life by messages in bottles, found objects, and of course open-ended correspondences with third parties. The US Postal Service was his tool but also his metaphor. Even his assiduously wrought collages bear the watermarks

of personal letters. No sharp line exists between the mail art and the collages. *Untitled (Dali/Courbet/Dear Marilyn Monroe)* (1975–94) [page 165] includes the salutation “Dear Marilyn Monroe,” while another is addressed to “Dear Jacques Derrida” [page 157]. *Untitled (Sophia Loren)* (1975–84) [page 97] arrives with forwarding instructions. Stuck on one collage is a teal-blue Nepalese stamp, and on another an X-ed out, green-tinted, akimbo commemorative conservation stamp. All are tightly choreographed gestures of need balanced by self-reliance, perhaps love, and certainly of an intense signatory presence. Serious and silly Ray Johnson continues writing to us all.

NOTES

1. Ray Johnson, letter to the author, September 23, 1993.
2. Wendy Steiner, “The Webmaster’s Solo: Ray Johnson Invites Us to the Dance,” in *Ray Johnson: Correspondences* (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, 1999), p. 77.
3. Grace Glueck, “What Happened? Nothing,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 1965.
4. “Four Artists in a ‘Mansion,’” *Harper’s Bazaar*, May 1952.
5. Robert Pincus-Witten, “Brother Ray,” *Artforum*, April 1995, p. 111.
6. Glueck, *op. cit.*
7. Rosalind Constable, “The Mailaway Art of Ray Johnson,” *New York Magazine*, March 2, 1970, p. 43.
8. David Bourdon, “Cosmic Ray: An Open Letter to the Founder of the New York Correspondence School,” *Art in America*, October 1995, p. 110.
9. Suzi Gablik, “700 Collages by Ray Johnson,” *Location 1* (edited by Thomas B. Hess and Harold Rosenberg), Summer 1964, p. 55.
10. Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” *Partisan Review*, 1964, reprinted in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 291.
11. Frank O’Hara, “You are gorgeous and I’m coming,” in *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 331.
12. O’Hara, *Collected Poems*, p. 499.
13. Cited in Randy Kennedy, “Always on His Own Terms,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 2015.
14. Henry Martin, “Should an Eyelash Last Forever? An Interview with Ray Johnson by Henry Martin,” *Lotta Poetica*, February 1984, pp. 3–24.



Candy Darling Cast, 1970. Plaster, paint, and eyelashes in plastic carrying case with artist's label. 17½ x 16 x 3 inches; 45 x 41 x 8 cm

Two Boots, 1966
Ink and collage on board
20⁵/₈ x 14¹/₂ inches; 52 x 37 cm



Ray Johnson 1966



A 2-Year-Old Girl Choked, 1967

Ink and collage on board

11¼ x 7¼ inches; 29 x 18 cm



**A 2-YEAR-OLD GIRL
CHOKED TO DEATH
TODAY ON AN
EASTER EGG.**

Ray Johnson 1967



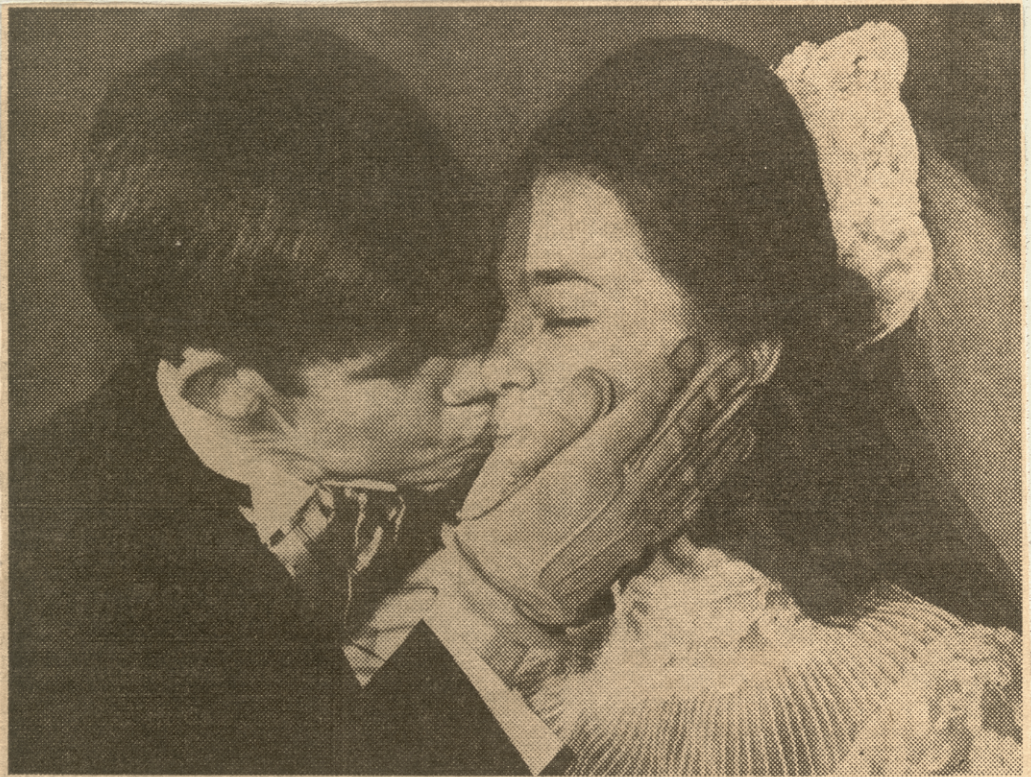
**A 2-YEAR-OLD GIRL
CHOKED TO DEATH
TODAY ON AN
EASTER EGG.**

Pals Slap, 1968
Ink and collage on board
16½ x 14 inches; 42 x 36 cm



FOR THE CAMERA: Mr. and Mrs. David Eisenhower kiss in the Plaza Hotel's Persian Room

Ray Johnson 1968



FOR THE CAMERA: Mr. and Mrs. David Eisenhower kiss in the Plaza Hotel's Persian Room

The New York Times (by Don Charles)

Ray Johnson 1968

Issa, 1968
Ink and collage on board
19⁷/₈ x 11¹/₂ inches; 51 x 29 cm



ISSA
1763-1827



Ray Johnson 1965

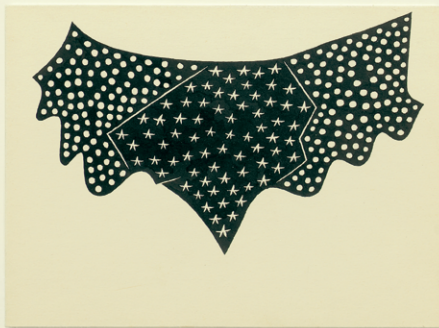


ISSA
1763-1827

I Love You Alice B. Toklas, 1969

Ink and collage on board

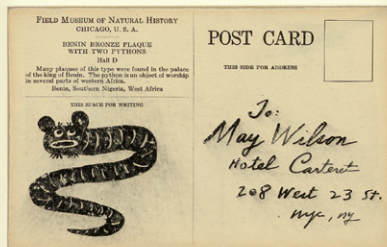
27½ x 17½ inches; 70 x 45 cm



Ray Johnson 1960



To: May Wilson, 1969
Ink and collage on board
19¼ x 14⅞ inches; 49 x 38 cm



Ray Johnson 1969

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
CHICAGO, U. S. A.

BENIN BRONZE PLAQUE
WITH TWO PYTHONS
Hall D

Many plaques of this type were found in the palace
of the king of Benin. The python is an object of worship
in several parts of western Africa.

Benin, Southern Nigeria, West Africa

THIS SPACE FOR WRITING



POST CARD

THIS SIDE FOR ADDRESS

To:
May Wilson
Hotel Carteret
208 West 23 St.
nyc, ny



Pipe, 1969
Ink and collage on board
20½ x 30 inches; 52 x 76 cm



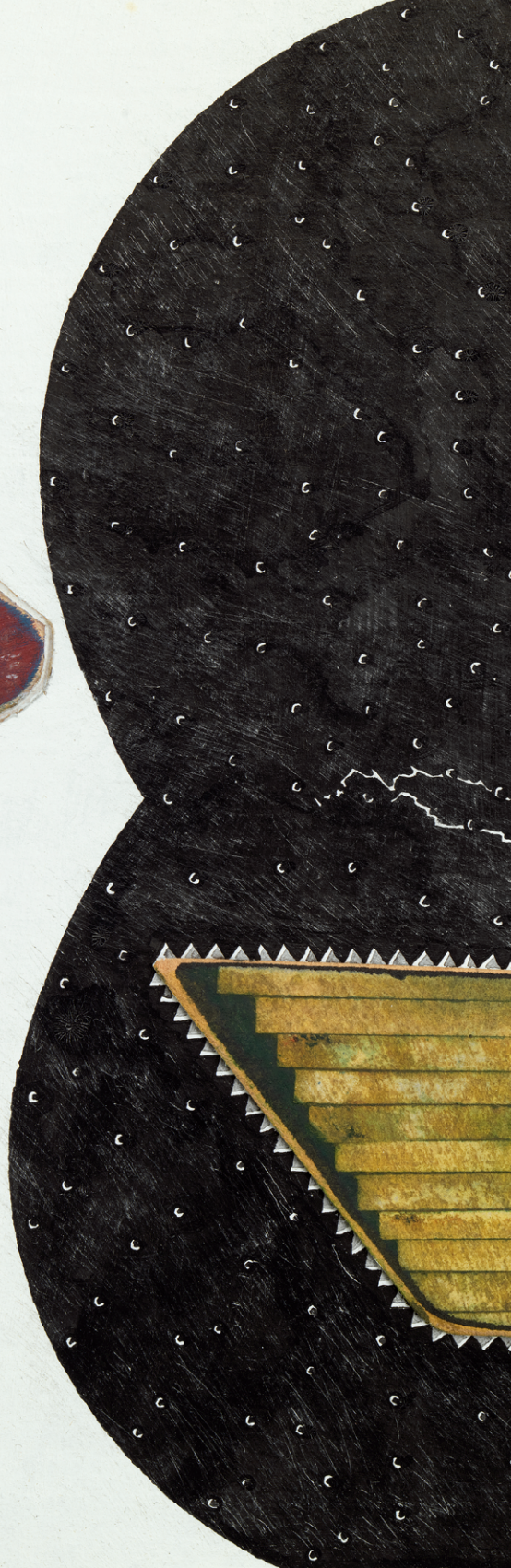
Ray Johnson 1965

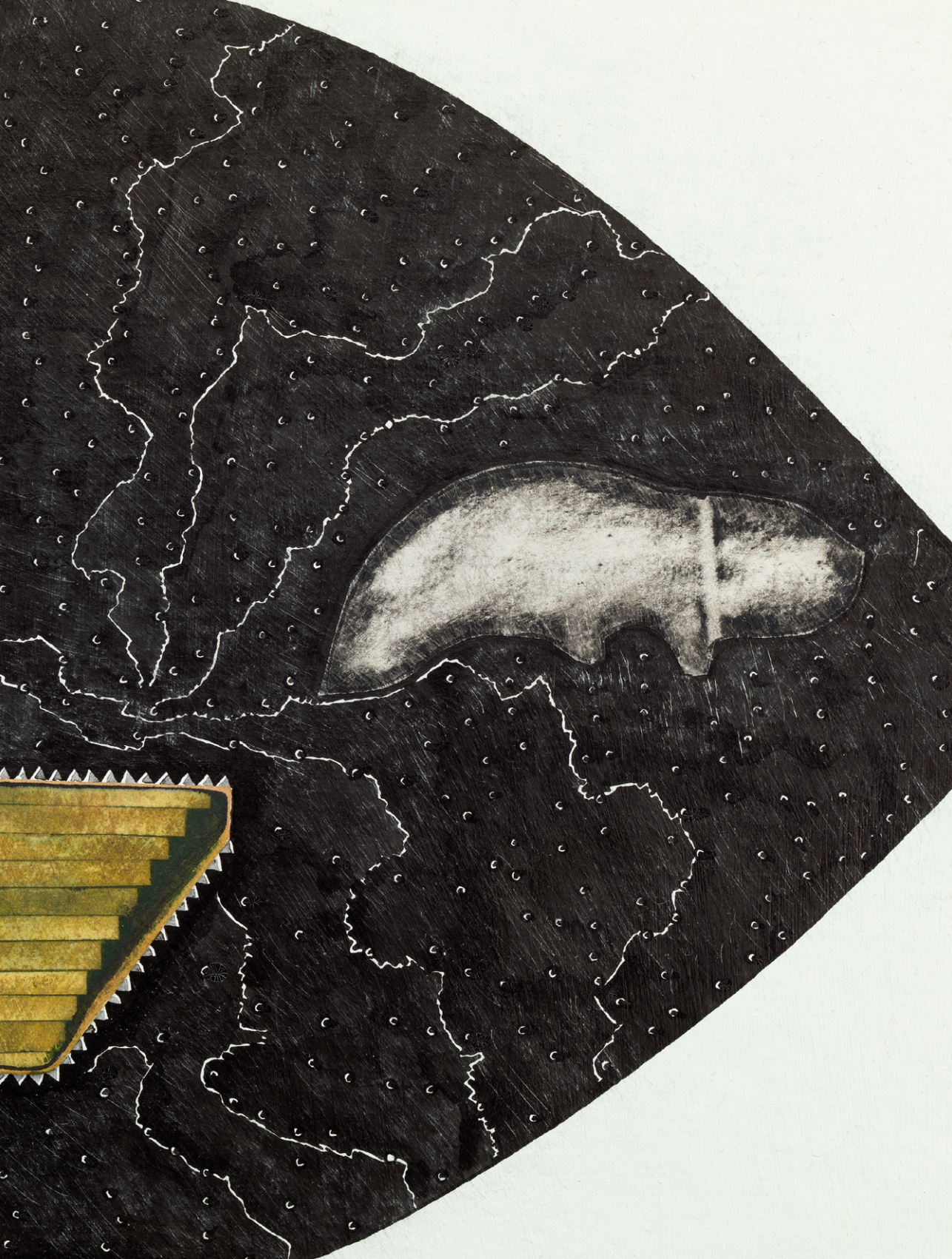




Jackson, 1972
Ink and collage on board
15½ x 21½ inches; 39 x 55 cm





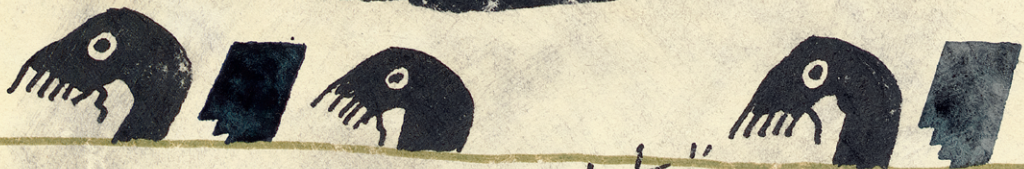


Untitled (Dear Marcia Tucker), 1972–75

Ink and collage on board

19³/₄ x 19³/₄ inches; 50 x 50 cm





6 1/2"



PIPE



MAY 13, 1972
DEAR MARCIA TUCKER,



ADDER

155A
1763-1827



Please send to May
MIKE BELT, Apt. 14,
Apt. 9,
240 EAST
25 ST.
NYC
10010

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ONE EIGHT SEVEN FIVE
ONE HANFORD
NEW YORK
POSTAGE
PAID

SPAM BELT CLUB
COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON
SPAM BELT CLUB
PATFISH



SPAM BELT CLUB
COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON
SPAM BELT CLUB

CATfish



Untitled (Jackson Pollock Fillets), 1973

Ink and collage on board

15³/₈ x 15³/₄ inches; 39 x 40 cm

POLLOCK FILLETS AMANDINE

OPPOSITE PAGE

2 pounds pollock
or other fish fillets,
fresh or frozen
¼ cup flour
1 teaspoon seasoned salt
1 teaspoon paprika

¼ cup melted butter or
margarine
½ cup sliced almonds
2 tablespoons lemon juice
4 to 5 drops liquid hot
pepper sauce
1 tablespoon chopped parsley

Thaw frozen fish. Cut fillets into 6 portions. Combine flour, seasoned salt, and paprika; mix well. Roll fish in flour mixture. Place fish in a single layer, skin side down, in a well-greased baking pan, 15 x 10 x 1 inches. Drizzle 2 tablespoons melted butter or margarine over fish. Broil about 4 inches from source of heat 10 to 15 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. While fish is broiling, sauté almonds in remaining butter in fry pan, and allow to turn a golden brown, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Add lemon juice, hot pepper sauce, and parsley; mix. Pour over fish. Serve at once. Makes 6 servings.

BARBECUED POLLOCK BURGERS

1 pound pollock
or other fish fillets,
fresh or frozen
1 cup boiling water
1 onion slice
¼ cup lemon juice
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup chopped onions



2 tablespoons butter or
margarine
½ cup catsup
1 teaspoon Worcestershire
sauce
½ teaspoon chili powder
¼ teaspoon sugar
½ cup shredded cheddar cheese



JACKSON POLLOCK I
666666



Ray Johnson 1973

Thaw frozen fish. Cut fillets in
 soned salt, and paprika; mix we
 fish in a single layer, skin side d
 15 x 10 x 1 inches. Drizzle 2 t
 garine over fish. Broil about 4 i
 minutes or until fish flakes eas
 fish is broiling, sauté almonds i
 allow to turn a golden brown,
 heat. Add lemon juice, hot pep
 over fish. Serve at once. Makes

BARBECUED POLLOCK BURRITO

1 pound pollock
 or other fish fillets,
 fresh or frozen
 1 cup boiling water
 1 onion slice
 ¼ cup lemon juice
 ½ teaspoon salt
 ½ cup chopped onions

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JACKSON



to 6 portions. Combine flour, sea-
salt. Roll fish in flour mixture. Place
down, in a well-greased baking pan,
2 tablespoons melted butter or mar-
garine from source of heat 10 to 15
minutes when tested with a fork. While
in remaining butter in fry pan and
stirring constantly. Remove from
heat, per sauce, and parsley; mix. Pour
over 6 servings.

INGERS

- 2 tablespoons butter or
margarine
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup catsup
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire
sauce
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon chili powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shredded cheddar cheese



POLLOCK I

6666



Untitled (Kaprow/David Bourdon), c. 1976

Ink and collage on board

8 x 9³/₄ inches; 20 x 25 cm







Untitled (Kaprow/American Flag), c. 1976

Ink and collage on board

12¼ x 12½ inches; 31 x 32 cm







Craig Claiborne Lou Reed, 1977
Acrylic and ink on panel
15 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches; 40 x 40 cm



Craig Claiborne Lou Reed

Rory Johnson 1977



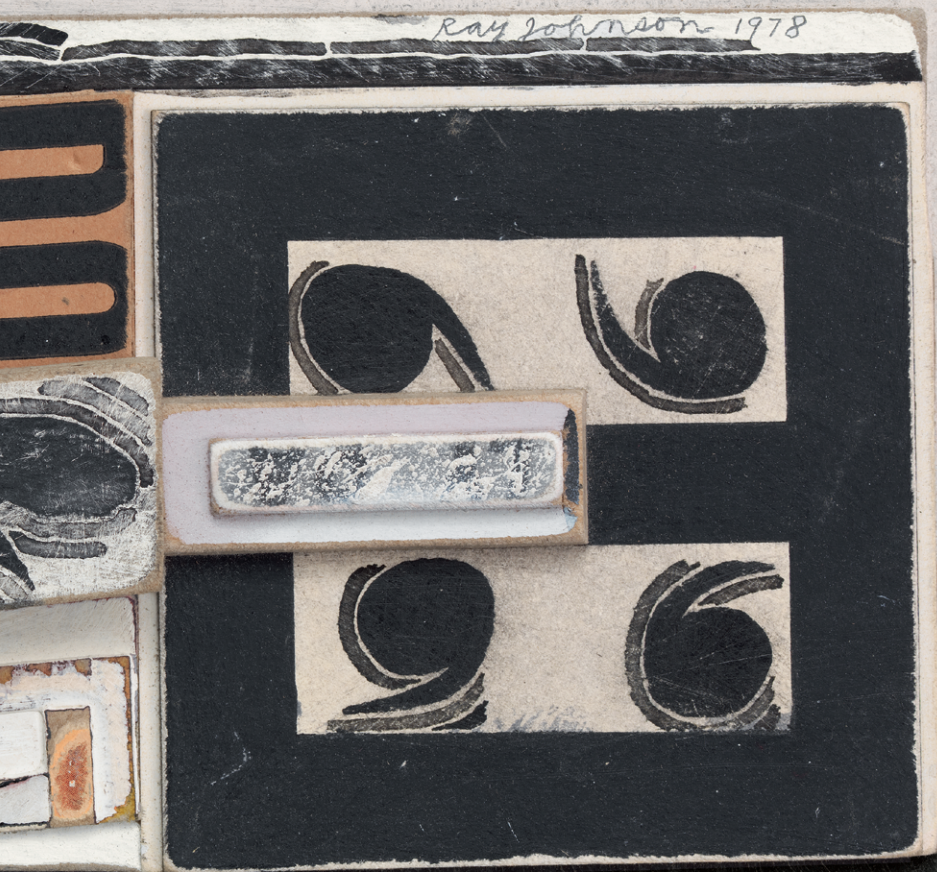


William Burroughs, 1978
Acrylic, ink, and collage on panel
15 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches; 40 x 40 cm





Ray Johnson 1978



Untitled (Crucified Nancy), c. 1977–80
Ink and collage on board
20 x 15 inches; 51 x 38 cm





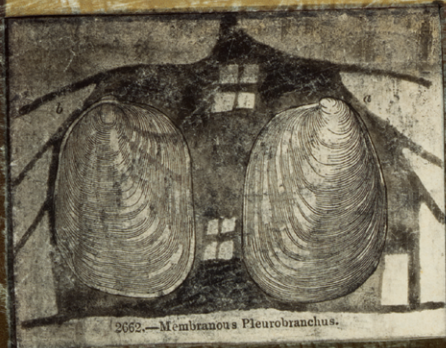
FIRST NEW YORK CORRESPONDENT
SCHOOL MEETING APRIL FIRST
THE CLUCKING CLERK, 7 MOTT
NEW YORK CITY 8:30 P.M. TE



Untitled (Dali/Buddha), c. 1977–80
Ink and collage on board
20½ x 15 inches; 52 x 38 cm





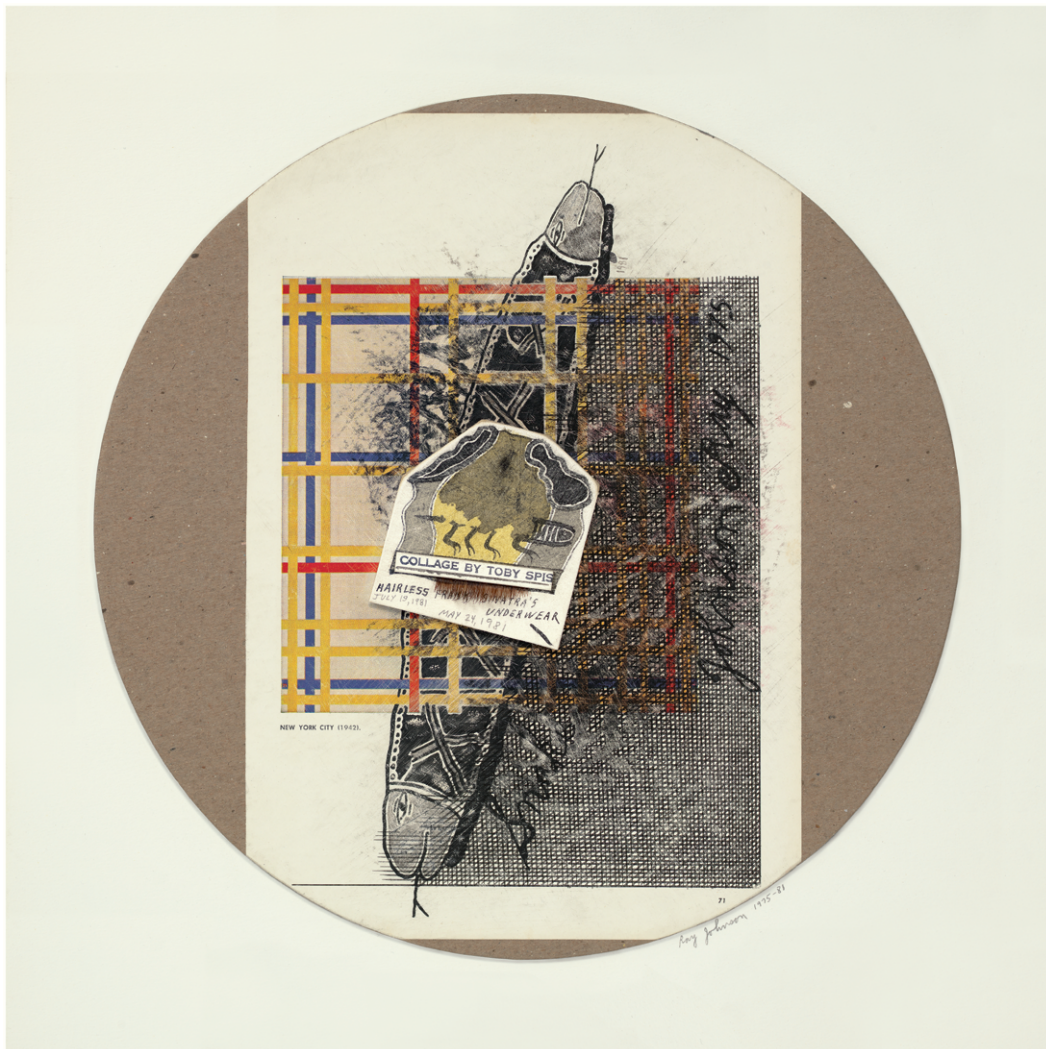


2662.—Membranous Pleurobranchus.

Untitled (Mondrian/Sinatra's Underwear), 1975–81

Ink and collage on board

12³/₈ x 12³/₈ inches; 31 x 31 cm





COLLAGE BY TOBY SPIS

HAIRLESS FRANK KIMMURA'S
JULY 19, 1981

UNDERWEAR
MAY 24, 1981

NEW YORK CITY (1942).

Louise Nevelson Chair, 1973–84

Ink and collage on board

16½ x 10½ inches; 42 x 27 cm



Roy Johnson 1972-73-74



Untitled (Sophia Loren), 1975–84
Ink and collage on board
12³/₈ x 11³/₈ inches; 31 x 29 cm



COLLAGE BY RAY JOHNSON
LA "CARITA" DI SOFIA LOREN
Il bambino è l'anima della pubblicità

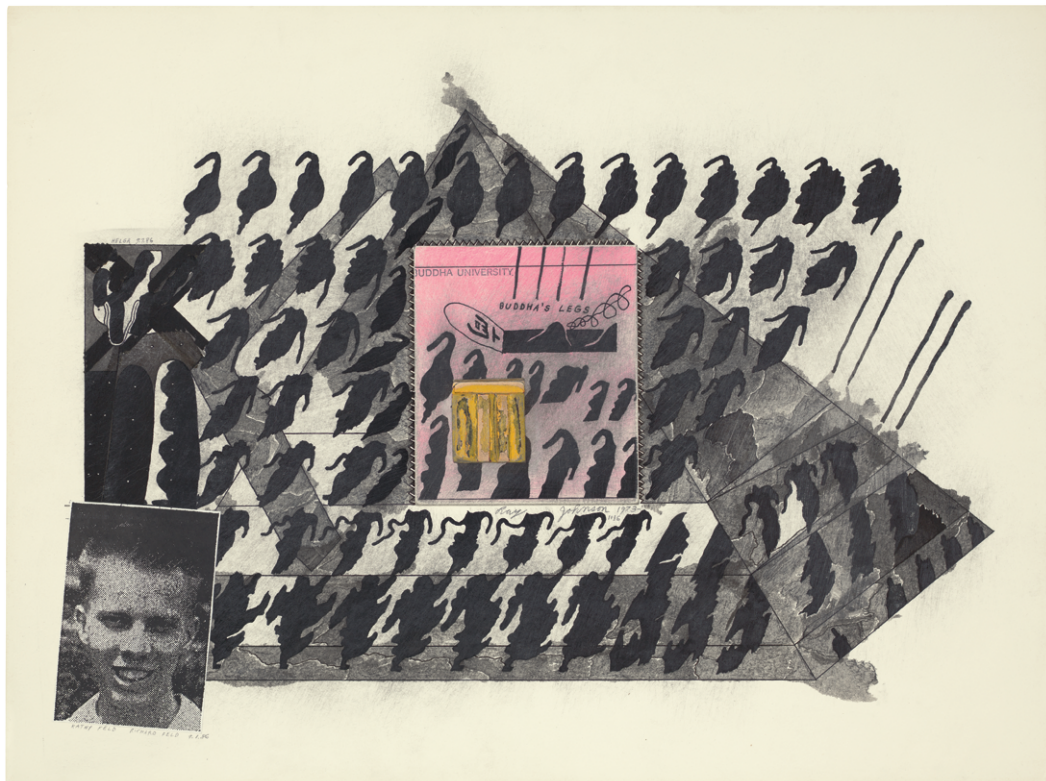
Please send to Peter Hujar (drawing of a face)

Ray Johnson 1975.04





Buddha's Legs, 1973–86
Ink and collage on board
14³/₄ x 19³/₄ inches; 38 x 50 cm



HELGA 9.7.86



BUDDHA UNIVERSITY.

BUDDHA'S LEGS



Ray

Johnson 1973-1986

Janis Joplin's Mother's Hat, 1972–88

Ink and collage on board

20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches; 51 x 41 cm





10



JANIS
JOPLIN 7.6.89

JANIS JOPLIN'S
MOTHER'S HAT

Silhouette University, 1976–88

Ink and collage on board

15³/₄ x 15³/₄ inches; 40 x 40 cm

SILHOUETTE UNIVERSITY DECEMBER 16, 1976

I HAVE DRAWN SILHOUETTES OF THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE, WHO HAVE KINDLY POSED FOR ME.

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. EDWARD ALBEE | 31. ROY LICHTENSTEIN | 106. CAROLINE |
| 2. MARIO AMAYA | 32. CARLE SPEARIN MC CAULEY | 107. GARY LATESKI |
| 3. ARKANA | 33. PALOMA PICASSO | 108. JOHN MACWHINNIE |
| 4. ARMAN | 34. SALLY QUINN | 109. DAN RATTINER |
| 5. DOUGLAS BAXTER | 35. LARRY RIVERS | 110. HAROLD |
| 6. PETER BEARD | 36. JACK YOUNGERMAN | 111. ROSENBERG |
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| 9. WILLIAM BURROUGHS | 39. DAVID BOURDON | 114. TITO SPIGA |
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| 13. PAULA COOPER | 43. WILLY EISENHART | 118. JANE WENNER |
| 14. BILL COPLEY | 44. THOMAS JOHN EVANS | 119. JANN WENNER |
| 15. WILLEM de KOONING | 45. HENRY GELTZHAUER | |
| 16. JEANNIE DIAO | 46. MARILYNN GELFMAN-PEREIRA | |
| 17. JIMMY ERNST | 47. SUSAN HALL | |
| 18. CHARLES FAHLEN | 48. DAVID HOCKNEY | |
| 19. NOELLE FAHLEN | 49. PETER HUJAR | |
| 20. PHYLLIS FLOYD | 50. JANE KAPLOWITZ | |
| 21. CHARLES HENRI FORD | 51. IVAN KARP | |
| 22. NANCY GROSSMAN | 52. BETTY KATZ | |
| 23. DAVID HARTMAN | 53. ROSAMUND BERNIER | |
| 24. ROBERT HUGHES | 54. TED CAREY | |
| 25. VICTOR HUGO | 55. ROBINLEECRUTCHFIELD | |
| 26. BILL KING | 56. ROBERT DASH | |
| | 57. DOROTHY MILLER | |
| | 58. NORMAN FISHER | |

SILHOUETTE

I HAVE DRAWN

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| 23. DAVID HA | 53. ROSAMUND BERNIER | |
| 24. ROBERT H | 54. TED CAREY | |
| 25. VICTOR H | 55. ROBINLEECRUTCHFIELD | |
| 26. BILL KI | 56. ROBERT DASH | |
| | 57. DOROTHY MILLER | |
| | 58. NORMAN FISHER | |

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| | 47. SUSAN HALL | |
| | 48. DAVID HOCKNEY | |
| | 49. PETER HUJAR | |
| | 50. JANE KAPLOWITZ | |
| | 51. IVAN KARP | |
| | 52. BETTY KATZ | |
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| | 56. ROBERT DASH | |
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| 26. BILL KI | 56. ROBERT DASH | |
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| | 58. NORMAN FISHER | |

22. CHARLES HENRI FORD
23. NANCY GROSSM
24. DAVID HARTM
25. ROBERT HU
26. VICTOR K
27. BILL K
28. BILL
29. ER
30. T
31. J
32. GE
33. LOUI
34. ALFONS
35. HUGH R
36. TOBY SP
37. SAUL ST
38. JEFF T
40. ANDY V
41. MAY W
42. WILLIAM

HE WAS
MORE THAN
EIGHTY
YEARS
OLD.
70. JANE KAPLOWITZ
71. IVAN KARP
72. BETTY KATZ
73. BILL KATZ
74. KATHARINE KUH
75. DOROTHY MILLER
HERTY
PAIK
SON

92. BET
93. JOH
94. ROSA
95. TED
96. ROB
97. RO
98. WIL
99. V
100.
101. S
102.
103.
104.
105

43. TOM AR
44. ATIRNO
45. LYNDA
46. MICHAEL
47. HOWARD
48. KLAUS
49. POLLY
50. DOROTH

SILHOUETTE

I HAVE DRA
KINDLY POS

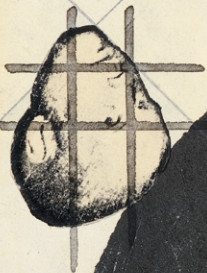
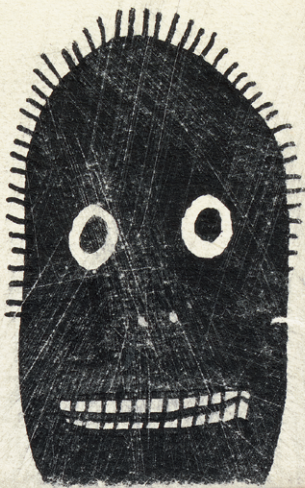
1. EDWARD AL
2. MARIO AMA
3. ARAKAWA
4. ARMAN
5. DOUGLAS B
6. PETER BE
7. MIKE BEL
8. RICHARD B
9. WILLIAM BURROUGHS
10. CRAIG CLAIBORNE
11. CHUCK CLOSE
12. LESLIE CLOSE
13. PAULA COOPER
14. BILL COPLEY

Ray Johnson 1977-80-86-88

FRIDAY
EVENING,
THERE WAS
NOTHING
IN THE
PAPERS.
THE
58. TIMOTHY BARRY
59. DAVID BOURDON
60. DAVID BOYCE
61. JOE BRAINARD
62. BUSTER CLEVELAND
63. WILLY EISENHART

111. HALINA R
112. TONY RO
113. JOHN R
114. TITO S
115. HEDDA
116. SUSAN
117. JOHAN
VANDER





HE WAS
RI FORD
MAN
AN
HES
O

HE WAS
MORE THAN
EIGHTY
YEARS
OLD.

61. PETER ROJAK
70. JANE KAPLOWITZ
71. IVAN KARP
72. BETTY KATZ
73. BILL KATZ
74. KATHARINE KUH
75. DOROTHY MILLER
76. BRIAN O'DOHERTY
77. NAM JUNE PAIK
78. CYNTHIA PATTISON
79. HARRY REEMS
80. ZANDRA RHODES
81. JIM ROSENQUIST
82. ROBERT ROSENBLUM
83. ARTURO SCHWARZ
84. CHRISTOPHER SCOTT
85. SYLVIA SLEIGH
86. HOLLY SOLOMON
87. HORACE SOLOMON
88. MARC STEVENS
89. JOHN WILLENBECHER
90. ED HIGGINS

ARDI
G
RELL
ELSON
SORIO
RTS
MAN
BERG
ETAUB
VOL
N
LGIN

TRONG

GLIS
ENNETT
NOVITZ
ESS
T
CHTENSTEIN

39. AMEI WALLACH

[Handwritten signature]

UNIVERSITY DECEMBER 16, 1976

SILHOUETTES OF THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE
FOR ME:

MONDAY
OCT 4, 1976
SAUL JUST
CALLED TO
TELL ME
THAT SUZY
TELEPHONED
TO INFORM
US THAT
DEAR
LEONID
DIED
FRIDAY
EVENING.
THERE WAS
NOTHING
IN THE
PAPERS.
THE

51. ROY LICHTENSTEIN
52. CAROLE SPEARIN McC
53. PALOMA PICASSO
54. SALLY QUINN
55. LARRY RIVERS
56. JACK YOUNGERMAN
57. LAWRENCE ALLOWAY
58. TIMOTHY BARRY
59. DAVID BOURDON
60. DAVID BOYCE
61. JOE BRAINARD
62. BUSTER CLEVELAND
63. WILLY EIGENHART

ROSENTHAL
ROSENTHAL
USSELL
PIGA
STERNE
SUTTLE
NA
BEEK

8. RICHARD BERNSTEIN
9. WILLIAM BURROUGHS
10. CRAIG CLAIBORNE
11. CHUCK CLOSE
12. LESLIE CLOSE
13. PAULA COOPER
14. BILL COPLEY

Untitled (Warhol Silhouette), 1976–89
Ink and collage on board
9 x 9 inches; 23 x 23 cm





Untitled (Cage, Picasso, Magritte, Donald Tru), 1972–90

Ink and collage on board

17 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 17 inches; 44 x 43 cm



JOHN
CAGE

PABLO
PICASSO

DONALD

1990



RENE
MAGRITTE

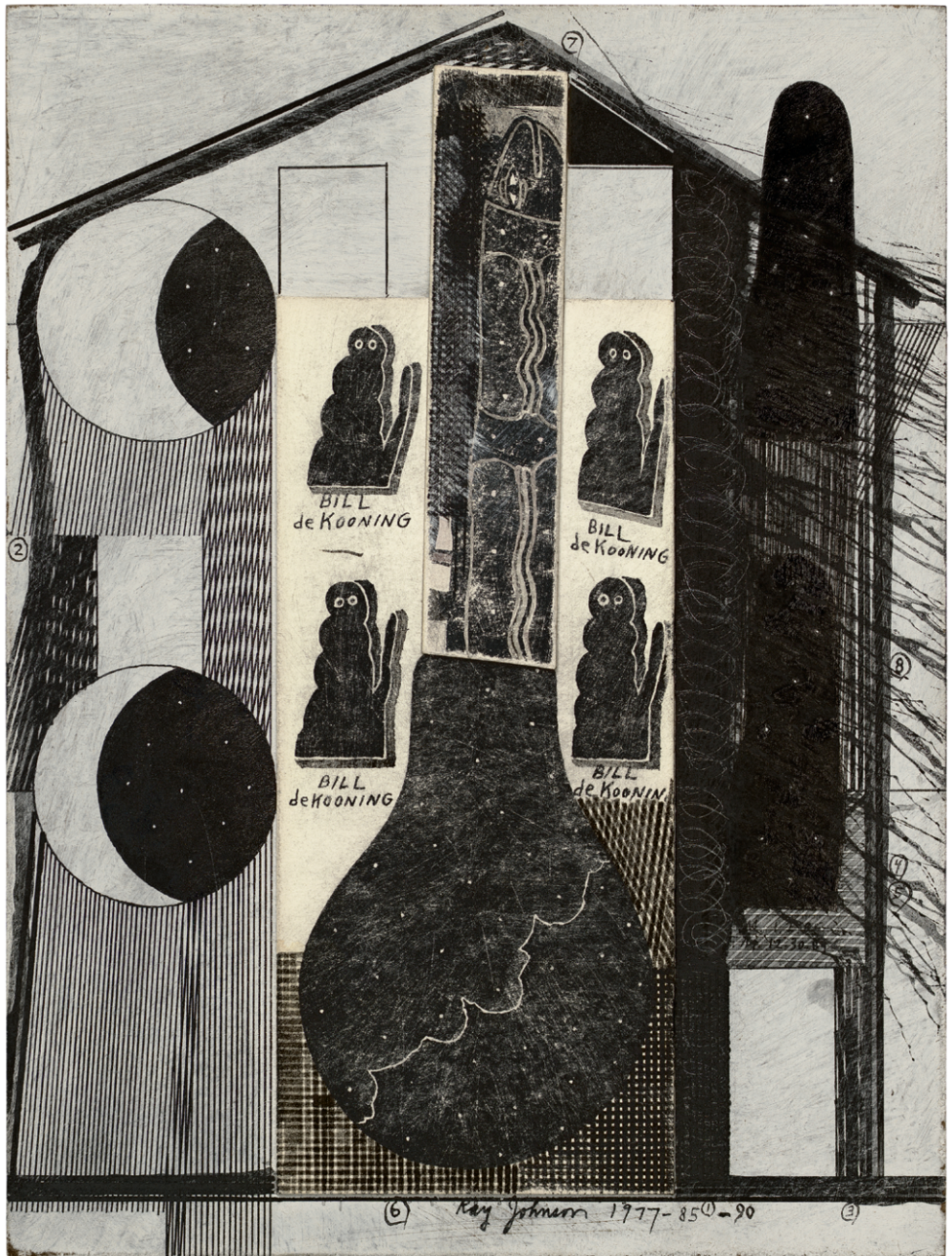
1970

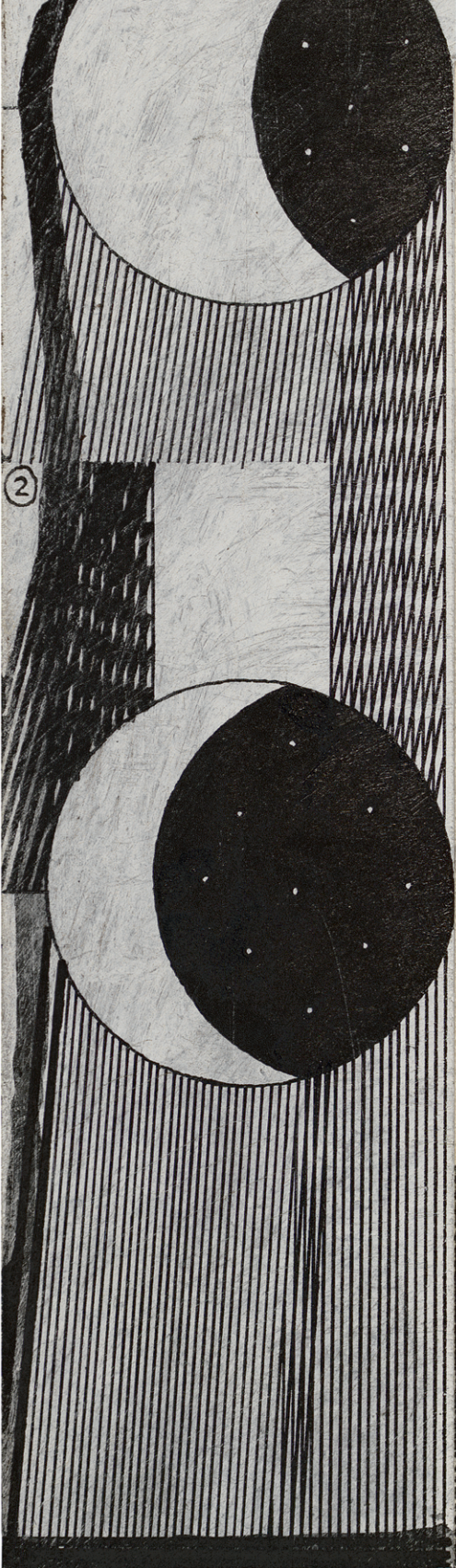
DTRU

Untitled (Bill de Kooning), 1977–90

Ink and collage on board

11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches; 30 x 23 cm





BILL
de Kooning



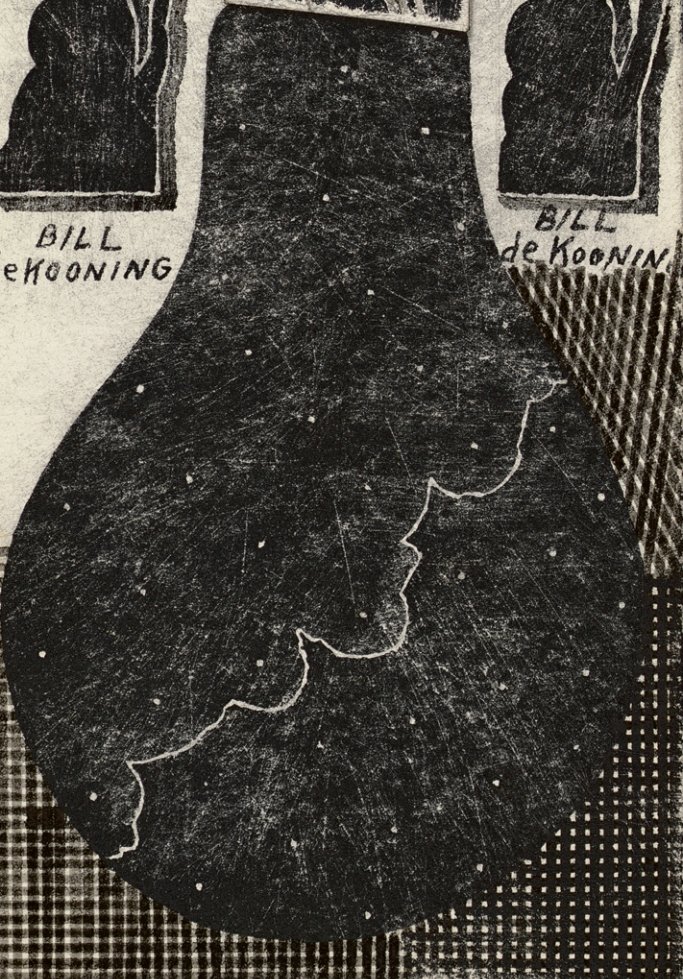
BILL
de Kooning



BILL
de Kooning



BILL
de Kooning



Untitled (Arseniopqr Hallmnopq), 1958–91
Ink and collage on board
17 x 13 inches; 43 x 33 cm



ARSENIOPQR
HALLMNOPQ

Ray Johnson 1958-71

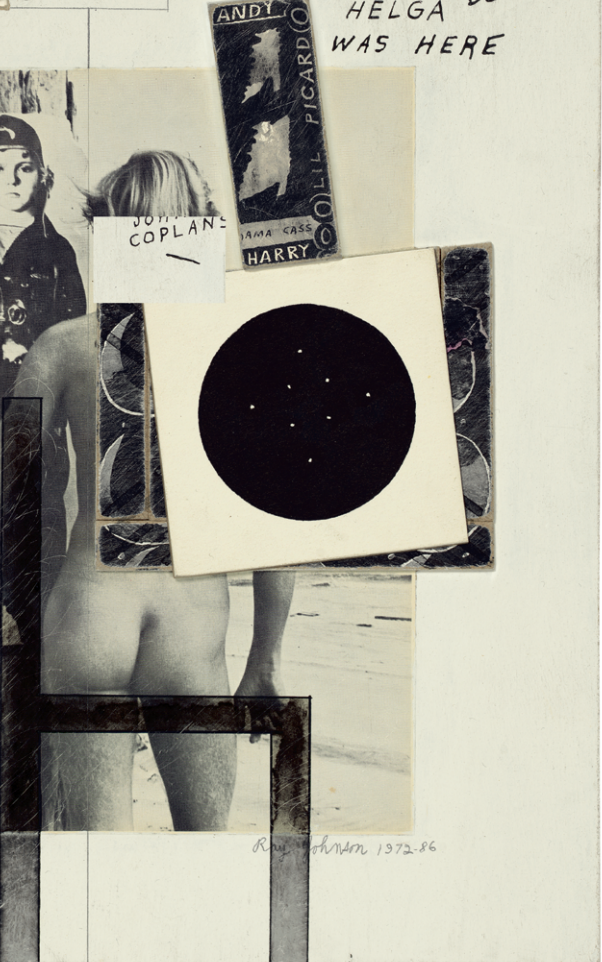
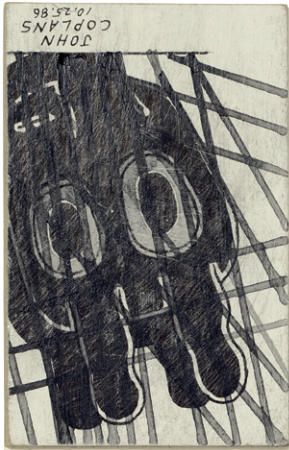




Untitled (Coplans/Shirley Temple), 1972–91

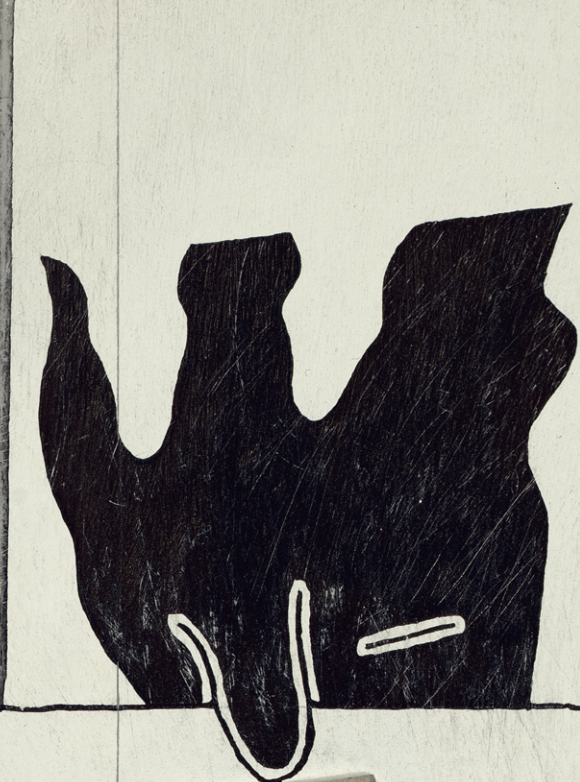
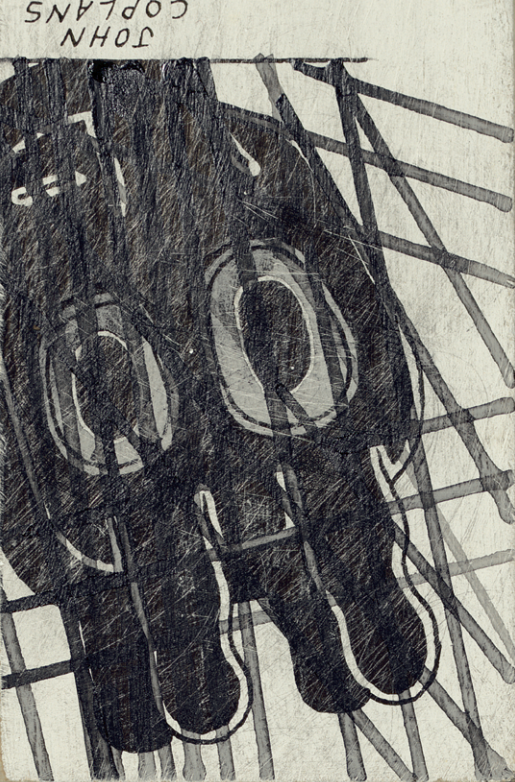
Ink and collage on board

14³/₈ x 9 inches; 37 x 23 cm



10-22-91

RAY SHAW 1972-86



JOHN
COPLANS

10.25.86



HELG
WAS



Untitled (Dear Harpo Marx), 1973–91
Ink and collage on board
15 x 15 inches; 38 x 38 cm



7.27.87
DEAR HARPO MARX,





Pyramid, 1957–94
Ink and collage on board
13½ x 13½ inches; 34 x 34 cm



Ray Johnson 1957-56-74



2129-94

PAUL SPRINGER 1958



2029.94



Ray Johnson 1957-86-94



SAUL STEINBERG 8.18.86

Untitled (Paloma's Underwear), 1972–94

Ink and collage on board

8 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 15 inches; 22 x 38 cm





CLOCK
GABLE

PALM JAM
UNDERWEAR



4.15.94

Ray Johnson 1972-80
81

Bee Stings, 1973–94
Ink and collage on board
15 x 15 inches; 38 x 38 cm



BEES
STING
WOMAN
TO DEATH
FORT
ALEZAI,
BRAZIL -
A SWARM
OF BEES
STUNG A
20-YEAR OLD
WOMAN TO
DEATH NEAR
HERE. RELATIVES
SAID THEY HAD TO
USE TORCHES TO
DRIVE THE INSECTS
AWAY FROM THE
CORPSE.

BEES STINGS

Dear
Whitney
Museum,
I hate
you
Love,
Ray

Dear Whitney Museum, I hate you Love, Ray Johnson

Ray Johnson 1973-87
79



Dear Whitney
Museum,
i hate
you.
Love,
Ray

FORT
ALEZA,
BRAZIL -
A SWARM
OF BEES
STUNG A
20-YEAR OLD
WOMAN TO
DEATH NEAR
HERE. RELATIVES
SAID THEY HAD TO
USE TORCHES TO
DRIVE THE INSECTS
AWAY FROM THE
CORPSE.

BEE STINGS

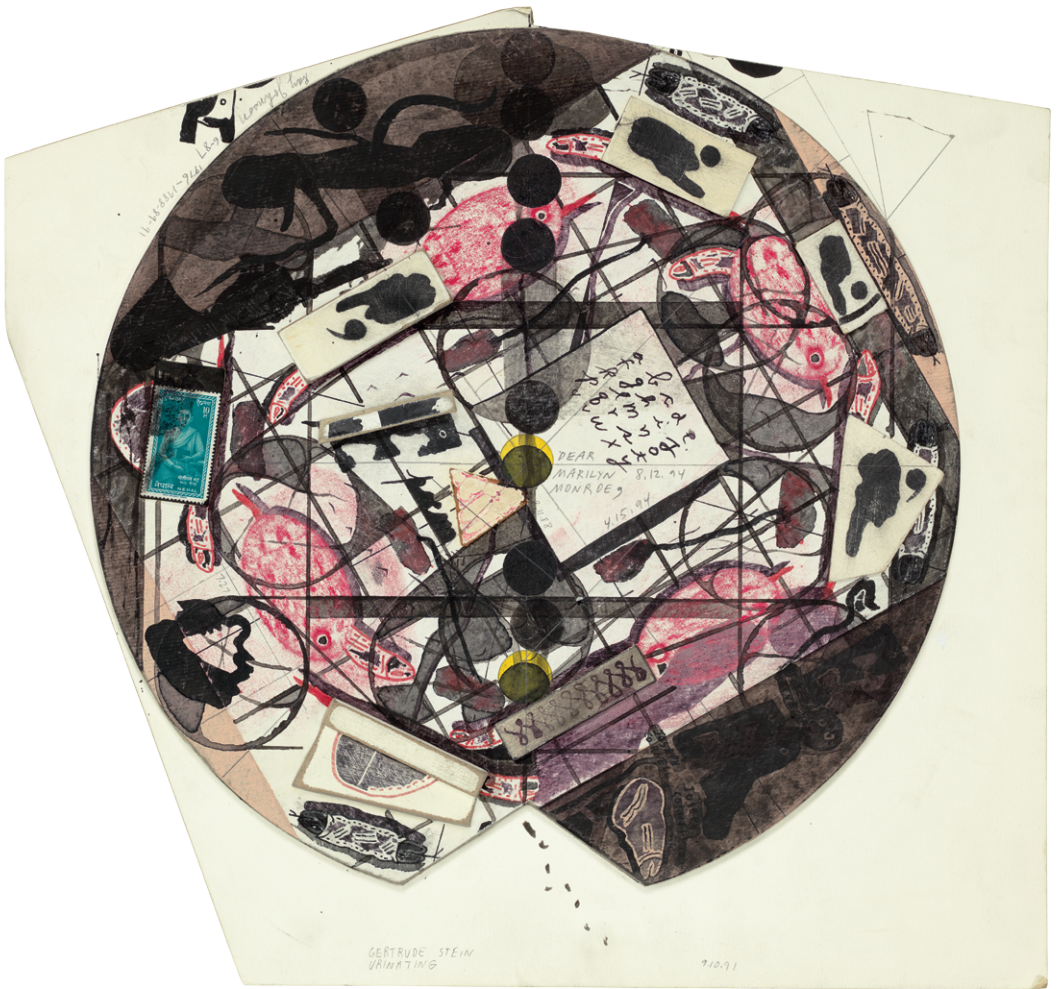
7.1.94

Ray Johnson 1973
-94

Untitled (Gertrude Stein Urinating/Dear Marilyn Monroe), 1976–94

Ink and collage on board

13⁷/₈ x 14³/₄ inches; 35 x 38 cm



GERTRUDE STEIN
VARIATIONS

9.10.91



GERTRUDE STEIN
URINATING



9.10.91

Untitled (David Bowie), 1979–94
Ink and collage on board
8½ x 9⅞ inches; 22 x 23 cm







Untitled (Dear Jacques Derrida), 1981–92
Ink, graphite, and collage on board
13½ x 11 inches; 34 x 28 cm



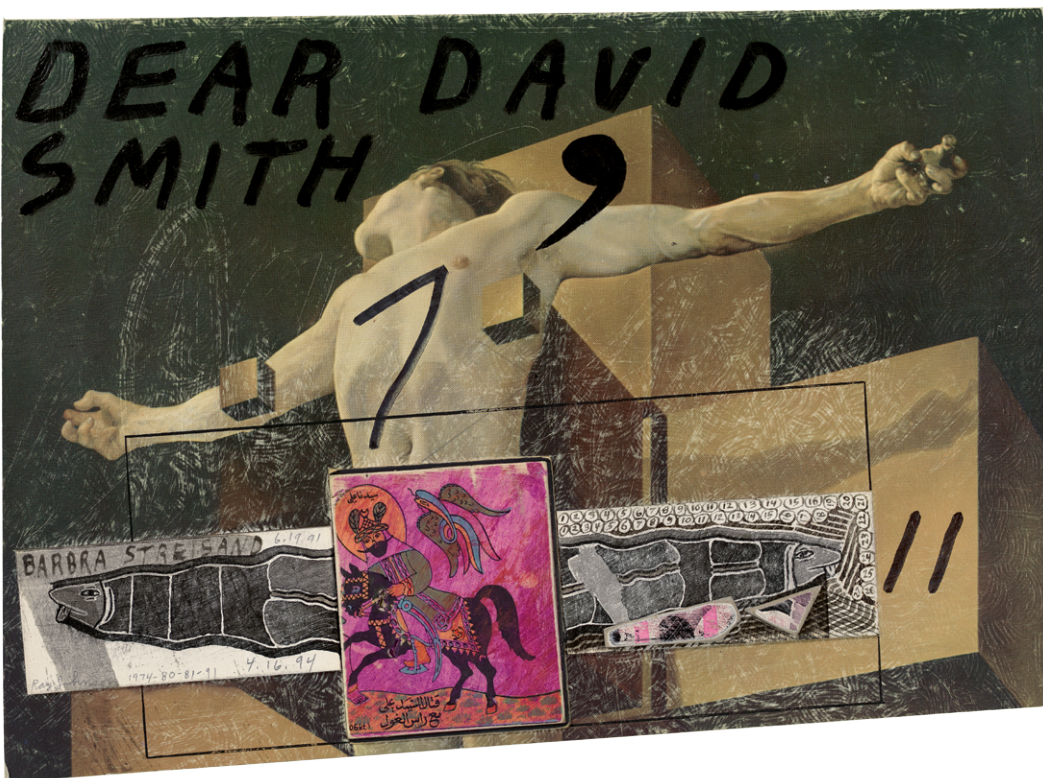


DEAR DERRIDA
12.14.90

NUSCH

Untitled (Dali/Dear David Smith/Barbra Streisand), 1974–94

Ink and collage on board
9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches; 25 x 34 cm

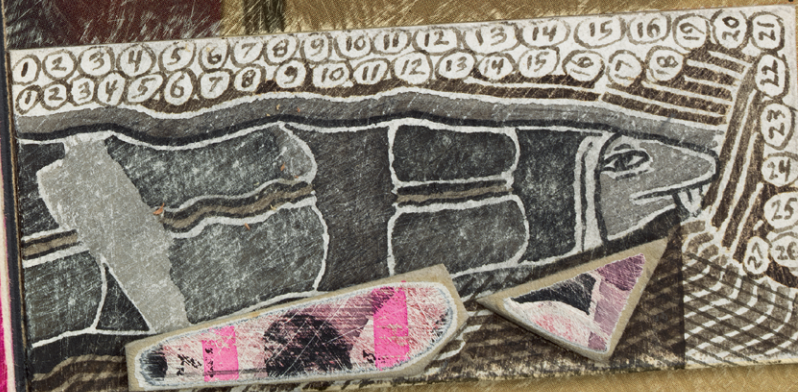


DEAR DA
SMITH





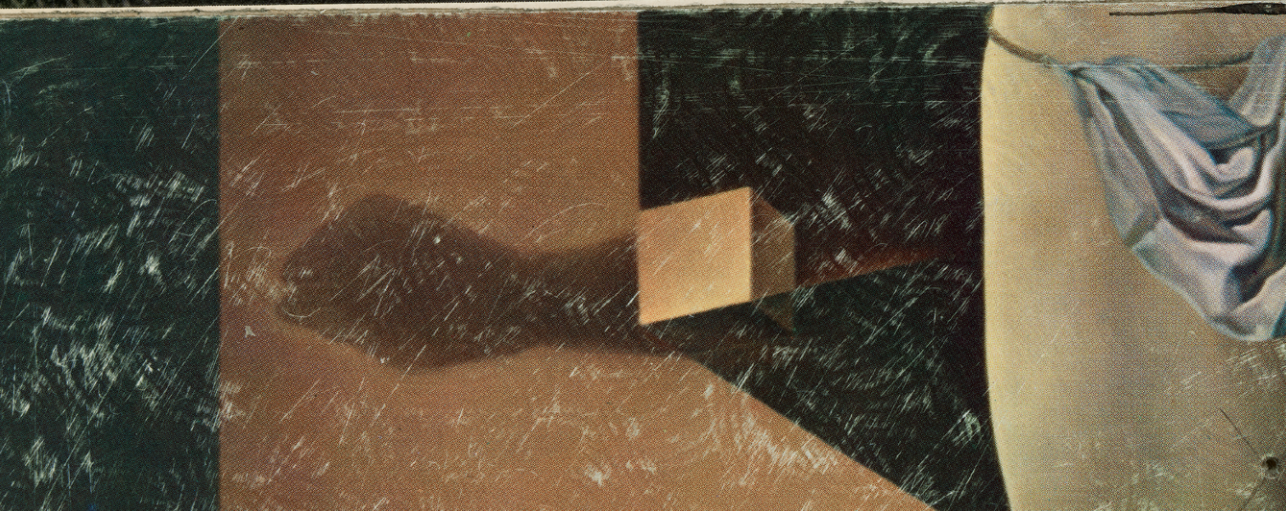
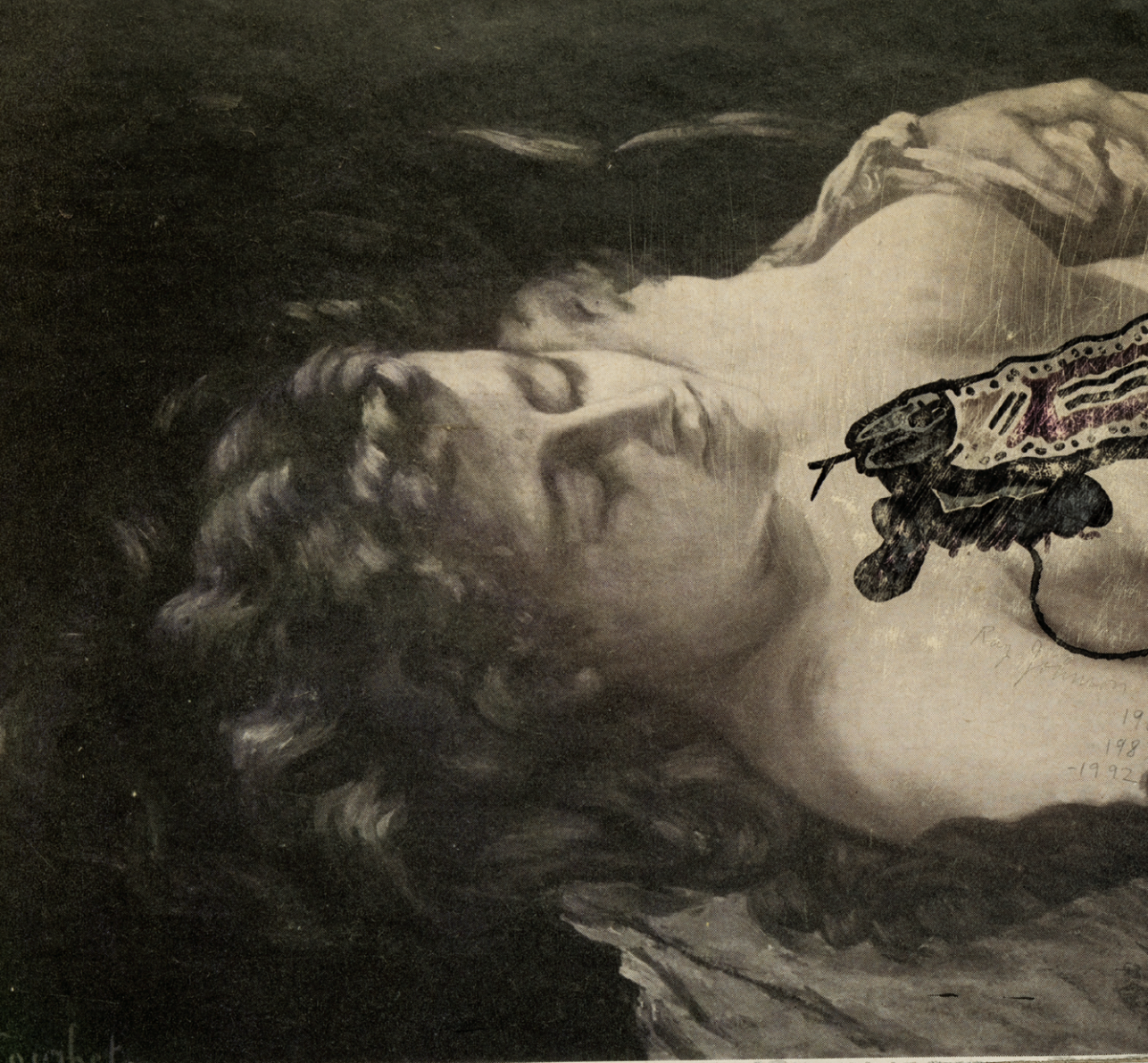
AVIO

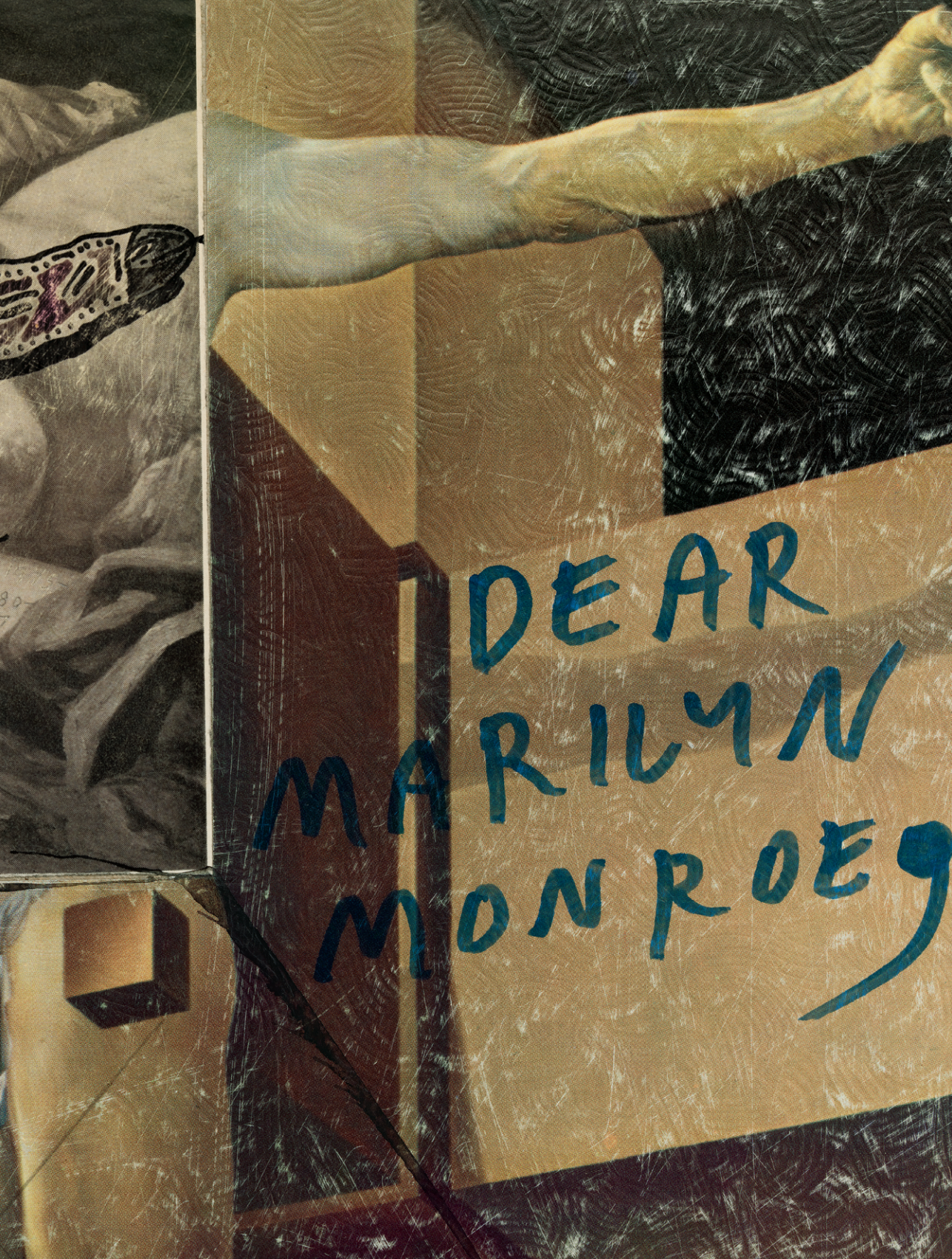


Untitled (Dali/Courbet/Dear Marilyn Monroe), 1975–94

Ink and collage on board
15 x 12¼ inches; 38 x 31 cm







DEAR
MARILYN
MONROE



verso

Untitled (Self-Portrait/Dance Diagram) [recto] / Dali's Crucifixion [verso], 1992
 Collage on board, double-sided
 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 10 inches; 49 x 25 cm



100. Dance Diagram, 1962
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas.





Untitled (Self-Portrait/Please send to Agnes Martin/Agnes Gund), 1993

Ink and collage on board
19 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches; 49 x 20 cm



12.6.93
AGNES
MARTIN
PLEASE
SEND TO
AGNES
MARTIN
12.31.93

F

OO

PLEASE
SEND TO
AGNES
GUND

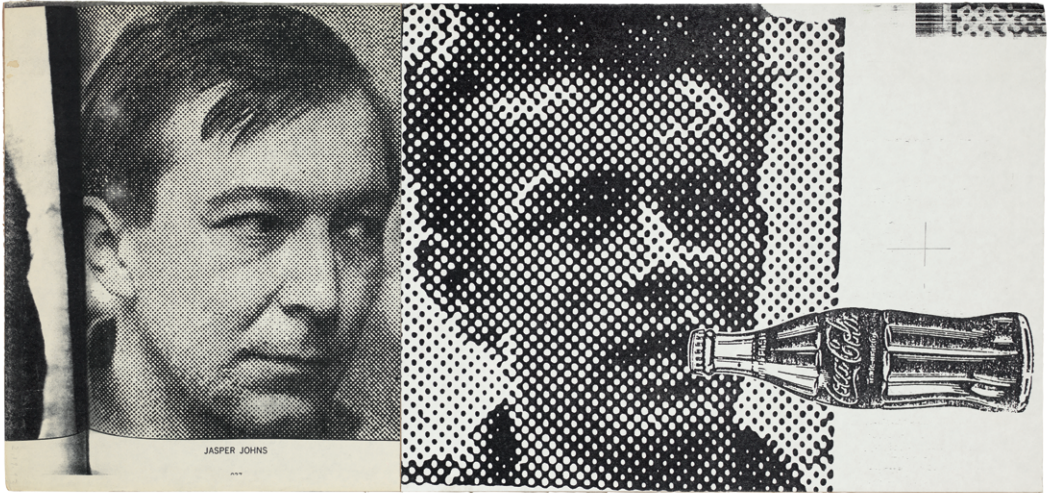
Martin 2
12.7.93



Untitled (Jasper Johns, James Dean with Coca-Cola), 1993

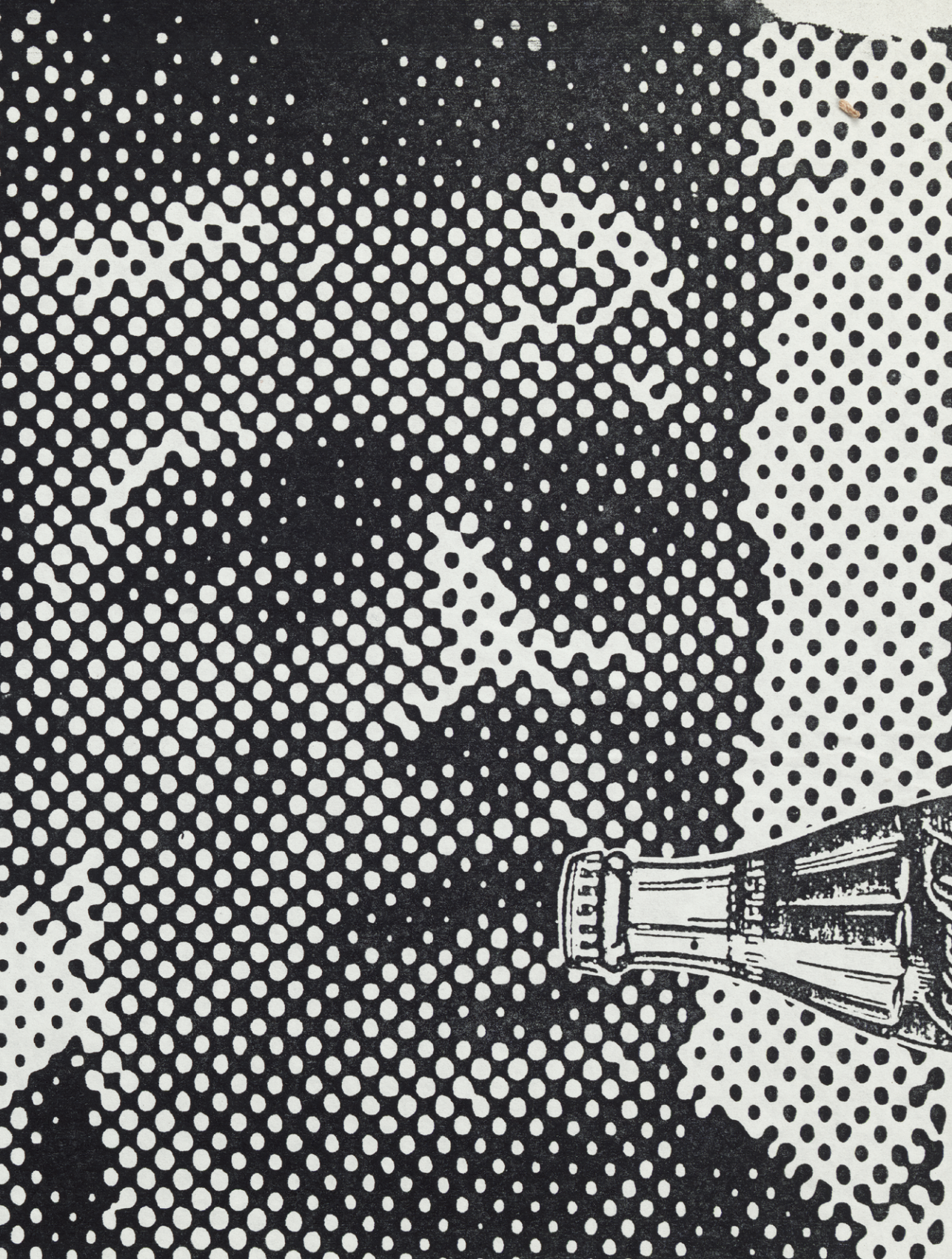
Collage on board

8½ x 18 inches; 22 x 46 cm





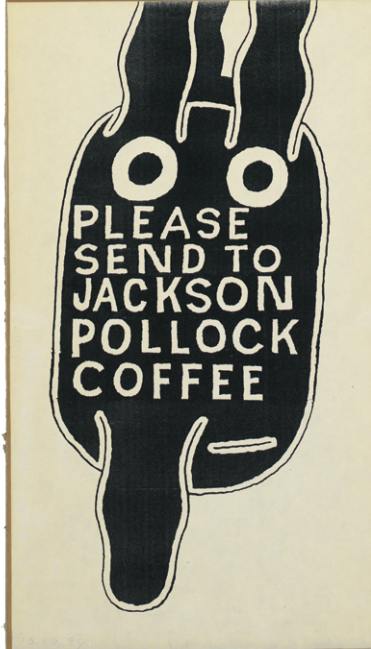
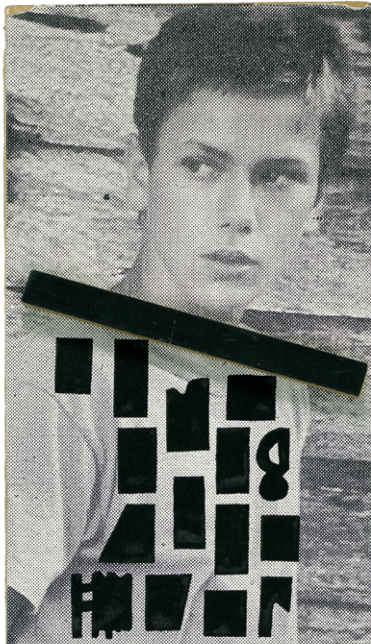
JASPER JOHNS



Untitled (River Phoenix/Please send to Jackson Pollock), 1994

Ink and collage on board

32 x 8 inches; 81 x 20 cm





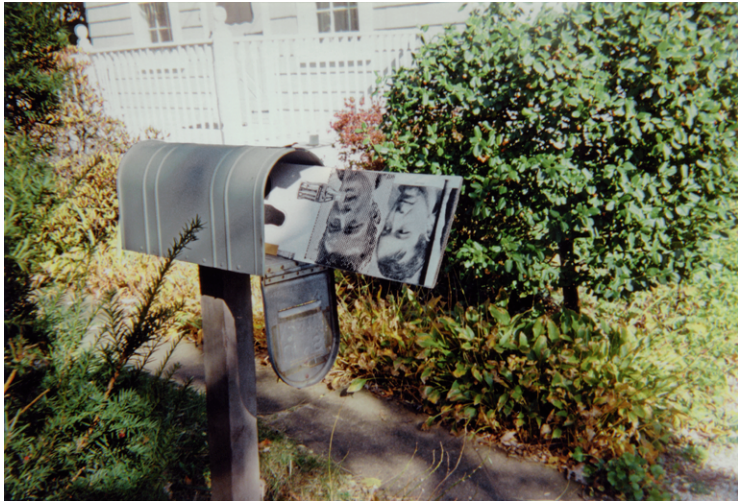
Untitled (Elvis with Scarface Bunny), 1993

Ink and collage on board

21 x 8½ inches; 53 x 22 cm







BIOGRAPHY

Ray Johnson was born on October 16, 1927. He grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. From 1945 to 1948 he attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where his teachers included Josef Albers and Robert Motherwell, and he became friends with John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Willem de Kooning, among others.

In 1949 he moved to New York and began to exhibit abstract paintings. Within a few years, however, he had rejected painting and made collage his primary medium. Its combinatory principles became central to his art, which grew to encompass performance and conceptual art, sculpture, and artist's books.

In 1953 Johnson took a job as Ad Reinhardt's studio assistant and the following year started producing small collages, which he called moticos (an anagram of the word *osmotic*), exhibiting them in unexpected places like sidewalks and cafés. He also mailed them to friends and acquaintances, a practice that quickly became his primary artistic focus and soon gave rise to the Mail Art movement. These works, which often incorporate celebrity images he found in magazines, are considered among the earliest examples of Pop Art.

Despite Johnson's extensive connections in the New York art world, he was ambivalent about its institutions. In a 1965 *New York Times* review of his first one-person exhibition, Grace Glueck called him "New York's most famous unknown artist."

In 1968 Johnson moved to Locust Valley, Long Island. His small house there would remain his home and studio for the rest of his life. He actively exhibited at galleries and museums in the United States and Europe from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.

Beginning in the late 1970s, with only a few exceptions, he stopped accepting invitations to show his art. Although he continued to make work, he allowed few visitors to his home and became increasingly reclusive during his last years. In January 1995, Ray Johnson died at age sixty-seven after jumping off a bridge in Sag Harbor, Long Island.

In 1999 the Whitney Museum of American Art organized "Ray Johnson: Correspondences," the first full-scale retrospective of his work.





I would like to express my thanks to Frances F. L. Beatty, Alex Adler, and Richard L. Feigen. The care and handling of the Ray Johnson estate, to which they have devoted many years of work, has been exemplary. It is a privilege to collaborate with them and an honor to continue their work. I would also like to thank Maria Ilario, Archivist, Ray Johnson Estate, whose help with this project has been invaluable.

—MM

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Essay © Brad Gooch

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Page 11: Frances F. L. Beatty

Page 12: John Stewart

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Ray Johnson on the New Jersey Turnpike, c. 1965

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Ray Johnson's high school portrait, 1945

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Untitled (Jasper Johns, James Dean with Coca-Cola)
in a mailbox, 1993. Photograph by Ray Johnson

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Self-portrait, c. 1993